

REUSABLE CUP IDENTIFICATION CLIP

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

¶1 The present invention relates generally to drinking vessels and, more particularly, to an apparatus removably engageable with a drinking vessel for distinguishing that drinking vessel from other drinking vessels. The phrases drinking vessel, beverage container and cup may be used interchangeably and are intended to refer to any one of a variety of containers such as, but not limited to, disposable foam, plastic and paper cups.

¶2 A large variety of disposable drinking vessels are readily available on the market today. The ubiquity, light weight and low cost of disposable cups make these disposable drinking vessels ideal for use at venues where drinks are served to a large number of people such as, for instance, cafeterias, parties and cook-outs.

¶3 However, disposable beverage containers have a disadvantage in that a given batch of these beverage containers are virtually identical so that, especially at large gatherings, it may be difficult for an individual user to distinguish his or her cup from that of another user. For example, at a birthday party at which fruit punch is served to all of the guests in blue plastic cups, one guest may easily confuse his or her cup with that of another guest during the course of the party. As a result, each guest may request a beverage refill in a new container every time he or she loses track of his or her original cup, thereby leading to excess waste and as well as extra cost to the event host.

¶4 A number of ways to personalize disposable beverage containers have been devised in order to prevent the aforementioned problems. One possibility is to use some type of pen or marker to make an identifying mark on the beverage container. For instance, a user may write his or her name on a plastic cup using a pen. This approach is disadvantageous in that such marks may be rubbed off during handling of the cup and, if the beverage container is damaged, the process must be repeated on a new cup.

¶5 In another approach, a clothespin-type clip may be attached to the rim of the drinking vessel to provide a visual cue for identifying the cup of a particular user. Such clips may be ornamented with designs or shapes and, additionally, they may readily be transferred from one cup to another. Various designs of these clothespin-type clips are produced, for example, by That Wine Is Mine®. However, these clothespin-type clips have a disadvantage in that they protrude above the rim of the drinking vessels when attached thereto, thereby possibly tipping these lightweight containers, particularly when the contents are low or a user accidentally brushes against the clip.

¶6 Attention is now directed to the figures, in which like components are indicated by like reference numerals. First referring to FIGS. 1A and 1B, a Drink Clip, which is generally indicated by a reference numeral 10, is basically a folded-over piece of plastic and is available from Crate and Barrel® [a commercial description of this Drink Clip is available, for example, on the Internet at http://www.crateandbarrel.com/itemgroups/19194_0.asp]. Drink Clip 10 includes a circular tag 12 and a tab 14 and is designed to slip onto a sidewall 15 of a beverage container 16. Clip 10 is configured such that circular tag 12 and tab 14 resiliently bias against sidewall 15 so as to capture sidewall 15 therebetween. That is, Drink Clip 10 attaches to beverage container 16 by pinching the sidewall of beverage container 16 between circular tag 12 and tab 14 in a way which continuously applies resilient biasing forces to the sidewall. The Crate and Barrel® Drink Clips, however are disadvantageous for a number of reasons. Bias forces between circular tag 12 and tab 14 will vary with

thickness of sidewall 15. Also, due to the clip's smooth design and constant pressure being applied to the walls of the glass, a vibration or impact, like setting the glass on a hard surface one or multiple times, can make the clip slip up and off the glass. Furthermore, since many types of cups include an enlarged, annular peripheral rim, the presence of such a rim on a cup may interfere with the operation of the Drink Clip. For example, Drink Clip 10 may break apart if circular tag 12 and tab 14 are sufficiently separated to pass over an enlarged, annular peripheral rim. Still further, once the Drink Clip is attached, a section of the clip generally protrudes above the rim of the glass, making it easier to topple by incidental contact with either a hand or article of clothing. Similarly, handling or gripping the glass may cause the fingers of the user to apply pressure to the bottom of the clip, which may also make the clip slip up and off the glass. The Drink Clip can also slip off if the glass is dropped. Additionally, by advertised statements, the Drink Clip is meant to be used with glass containers only and will likely damage or weaken the rims of paper, plastic and foam cups by creasing or denting the rim that is meant to strengthen and stabilize the container. By limiting the clip to a single shape and having only eight different colors, parties of nine or more people would have to use multiple clips to ensure personal identification, thereby increasing the problems mentioned above and possibly ending up with two or more identical drinking vessels that support the same color clip.

¶7 The present invention provides an identification clip and associated method which serves to reduce or eliminate the foregoing problems in a highly advantageous and heretofore unseen way and which provides still further advantages.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

¶8 As will be disclosed in more detail hereinafter, there is disclosed herein an apparatus for use in association with a cup for aiding a user in identifying that cup, which cup having an opening that is defined by an enlarged, annular peripheral rim. In one aspect of the invention, the apparatus includes a body including an attachment portion configured for engaging at least a part of the enlarged, annular peripheral rim in a way which supports the body on the cup.

¶9 In another aspect of the invention, the apparatus includes a body including an attachment portion configured for engaging at least a part of the enlarged, annular peripheral rim without application of a continuous, resilient biasing force to the enlarged, annular peripheral rim in a way which supports the body on the cup.

¶10 In yet another aspect of the invention, the apparatus includes an attachment portion configured for engaging at least a part of the enlarged, annular peripheral rim in a way which supports the body on the cup. The attachment portion includes at least one tab configured to at least partially surround the engaged part of the enlarged, annular peripheral rim, and at least one protrusion configured to cooperate with the tab such that the attachment portion is engaged with the engaged part of the enlarged, annular peripheral rim. The apparatus further includes an identification portion, connected with the attachment portion, such that the identification portion is positioned adjacent to the sidewall when the attachment portion is in engagement with the enlarged, annular peripheral rim.

¶11 In still another aspect of the invention, a method for use in association with a cup for aiding a user in identifying that cup, which cup having an opening that is defined by an enlarged, annular peripheral rim, is disclosed. The method includes attaching a body to the cup, where the body includes an attachment portion configured for engaging at least a part of the enlarged, annular peripheral rim in a way which supports the body on the cup.

¶12 In a further aspect of the invention, the method includes attaching a body to the cup, where the body includes an attachment portion configured for engaging at least a part of the enlarged, annular peripheral rim without application of a continuous, resilient biasing force to the enlarged, annular peripheral rim in a way which supports the body on the cup.

¶13 In a still further aspect of the invention, the method includes attaching an apparatus to the cup, where the apparatus includes an attachment portion configured for engaging at least a part the enlarged, annular peripheral rim in a way which supports the body on the cup. The attachment portion includes at least one tab configured to at least partially surround the engaged part of the enlarged, annular peripheral rim, and at least one protrusion configured to cooperate with the tab such that the attachment portion is engaged with the engaged part of the enlarged, annular peripheral rim. The body further includes an identification portion, connected with the attachment portion, such that the identification portion is positioned adjacent to the sidewall when the attachment portion is in engagement with the enlarged, annular peripheral rim.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

¶14 The present invention may be understood by reference to the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the drawings briefly described below.

¶15 FIGS. 1A and 1B are diagrammatic illustrations of a prior art drink clip.

¶16 FIGS. 2A-2D are diagrammatic illustrations of a drink clip of the present invention.

¶17 FIGS. 3A-3C are diagrammatic illustrations of one embodiment the drink clip of the present invention when attached to a cup.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

¶18 The following description is presented to enable one of ordinary skill in the art to make and use the invention and is provided in the context of a patent application and its requirements. Various modifications to the described embodiments will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art and the generic principles herein may be applied to other embodiments. Thus, the present invention is not intended to be limited to the embodiment shown but is to be accorded the widest scope consistent with the principles and features described herein.

¶19 Turning again to the drawings, attention is now directed to FIGS. 2A-2D, which illustrate a reusable, identification (ID) clip 100 formed in accordance with the present invention. FIGS. 2A-2D respectively provide front, rear, cross section and top views of identification clip 100. In the embodiment shown in FIGS. 2A-2D, ID clip 100 is integrally formed of a single piece of plastic and includes a tag portion 102 and a clip portion (enclosed by a dashed box 104). Clip portion 104 includes two tabs 106' and 106" and a protrusion 108 on rear of an upper region of tag portion 102. As is most readily seen in FIG. 2C, ID clip 100 is generally in the shape of an inverted "J", where tabs 106' and 106" form the curved portion of the inverted "J" cooperating with tag portion 102 to form the elongated, leg portion of the inverted "J". As can be seen in the top view of FIG. 2D, ID clip 100 can also be arcuate in shape so as to follow the contour of the beverage container opening, although this feature is not a requirement of the ID clip of the present

invention. In particular, clip portion 104 may be configured to at least approximately conform to the curvature of the cup with which the ID clip is to be engaged.

¶20 Continuing to refer to FIGS. 2A-2D, tabs 106' and 106'' cooperate with tag portion 102 to define a pair of apertures 111' and 111'', respectively. The tabs are designed to exhibit sufficient strength and stiffness for retaining the original circular shape of apertures 111' and 111'' while being resilient enough to be able to be manually flexed for fitting onto and pulled off of the lip (or an enlarged, annular peripheral rim) of a beverage container. Furthermore, the tabs may be formed of a flexible enough material to accommodate possible flexing of the cup. Tabs 106' and 106'' are curved to approach tag portion 102 in a way which defines a gap or mouth 112 defined the tips of tabs 106' and 106'' and tag portion 102 so as to be able to accommodate a lip of a cup therein, as will be described in detail immediately hereinafter in reference to FIGS. 3A-3C.

¶21 The positioning of ID clip 100 when engaged with a cup 200 is illustrated in FIGS. 3A-3C. In the embodiment shown in FIGS. 3A-3C, cup 200 includes an enlarged, annular peripheral rim (or annular lip) 202 connected with a sidewall 204. It is noted that enlarged, annular peripheral rim 202 may be in various orientations with respect to sidewall 204. For example, rim 204 may be moved inward or outward with respect to the sidewall while not affecting the utility of ID clip 100. ID clip 100 is shaped in a way such that ID clip 100 follows the general shape of cup 200 when attached thereto. That is, when in engagement with cup 200, ID clip 100 does not excessively protrude from the shape of the cup itself such that ID clip 100 does not significantly interfere with the normal function of the cup as a drinking vessel or aid in accidentally tipping or spilling the contents of the cup by inadvertent contact with, for example, a hand or a piece of clothing. This low-profile attachment position of ID clip 100 onto cup 200 is considered to be advantageous.

¶22 The details of the attachment configuration of ID clip 100 onto cup 200 are shown in FIG. 3C, which is an enlarged view within the dashed circle as shown in FIG. 3B. As shown in FIG. 3C, curved tab 106' (and, by analogy, tab 106'') of ID clip 100 basically engages at least a portion of lip 202 of cup 200, while protrusion 108 prevents ID clip 100 from being accidentally pulled off of the lip of the cup. Gap 112 is smaller than a rim thickness (indicated by a letter "t" in FIG. 3C) but curved tab 106' is formed of a resilient material with sufficient shape memory such that curved tab 106' flexes enough to let lip 202 slip through gap 112. Once curved tab 106' has been hooked over lip 202, curved tab 106' returns to its original shape such that curved tab 106' and protrusion 108 cooperate to hold ID clip 100 onto cup 200. Conversely, ID clip 100 may be readily removed by a user by pulling on tag portion 102 and forcing curved tab 106' to flex slightly to slide curved tab 106' and protrusion 108 over lip 202.

¶23 Curved tab 106' and protrusion 108 are disposed so as to prevent unintentional removal of ID clip 100 from cup 200. In fact, although a continuous biasing force between curved tab 106' and protrusion 108 may be applied to resiliently capture cup 200 therebetween, such a biasing force is not required because the design of the curved tabs and the protrusion may be such that lip 202 is loosely or slidably captured within apertures 111' and 111'' of the inverted "J" without a need for additional biasing force. That is, the annular rim of cup 200 can rest in apertures 111' and 111'' of ID clip 100 without a need for the application of continuous biasing forces. The diameter of apertures 111' and 111'' may be (i) less than, (ii) equal to, or (iii) greater than thickness *t* of lip 202 and still allow ID clip 100 to be engaged with cup 200. Tabs 106' and 106'' and tag portion 102 may be configured in any suitable way so long as they cooperate to define gap 112 and at least one receiving aperture for receiving the rim of the cup therein in a manner consistent with the teachings

set forth above. For example, a single curved tab, in cooperation with protrusion 108, may be sufficient to hold ID clip 100 onto cup 200. Alternatively, protrusion 108 may be eliminated for simplicity of manufacture if, for example, the curvature of tabs 106' and 106" and the size of apertures 111' and 111" are adjusted accordingly.

¶24 It is emphasized that, while the prior art drink clips discussed in the Background section require continuous biasing force to hold the drink clips in place on the cup, the ID clip of the present invention does not require the application of such a continuous biasing force since the curvature of tabs 106' and 106" and the size of apertures 111' and 111" as well as the location of protrusion 108 cooperate to capture lip 202 within apertures 111' and 111". Since most disposable beverage containers available today include some sort of an enlarged, annular peripheral rim for strength and stability, the design of the ID clip of the present invention is considered particularly advantageous.

¶25 Although each of the aforescribed embodiments have been illustrated with various components having particular respective orientations, it should be understood that the present invention may take on a variety of specific configurations with the various components being located in a wide variety of positions and mutual orientations and still remain within the spirit and scope of the present invention. Furthermore, suitable equivalents may be used in place of or in addition to the various components, the function and use of such substitute or additional components being held to be familiar to those skilled in the art and are therefore regarded as falling within the scope of the present invention. For example, the ID clip of the present invention may be formed or molded out of a variety of materials such as, but not limited to, metal such as stainless steel, non-toxic plastic, polypropylene, carbon or composite thereof as long as the material provides sufficient resilience and shape memory so as to securely but removably attach to the drinking vessel. The ID clip of the present invention may be formed, for example, by injection molding, if made of plastic, or by stamping, if made of metal. The ID clip may be integrally formed as a single piece, or, for instance, the clip portion may be formed separately from tag portion 102 then joined together in an appropriate way. As another example, although the ID clip of the present invention is shown to be in the shape of an inverted "J" in FIGS. 2C and 3C, the ID clip of the present invention may alternatively be in the shape of a shepherd's crook or question mark. In particular, the use of a protrusion may be eliminated in an ID clip in the form of a question mark because the curvature of the tabs and the position of the tag portion may be configured such that the tag portion prevents the ID clip from being easily slipped off of the lip of the cup. Alternatively, tabs 106' and 106" may be boxy in shape (i.e., having planar sections) rather than being curved (i.e., rounded) in shape. As yet another alternative, the protrusion may have a shape other than the circular shape shown in the figures of the present application. Furthermore, the ID clip of the present invention may be manufactured in bulk with low cost materials so as to be disposable after use or with more durable materials such that the ID clips can be washed and reused. As another example, the tag portion of the ID clip of the present invention may be formed in one of a variety of shapes and colors and designs. For instance, the tag portion may be imprinted with a company logo and/or an event name for advertising and promotional purposes. In fact, the tag portion may be of various colors resulting from a variety of treatments including, but not limited to, molded-in color(s), paints, decals, stickers or markers. The tag portion may also be formed in a variety of shapes and sizes while being unobtrusive enough to not interfere with the normal function of the cup as a drinking vessel.

¶26 Therefore, the present examples are to be considered as illustrative and not restrictive, and the invention is not to be limited to the details given herein, but may be modified within the scope of the appended claims.